UNITED
NATIONS

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Economic and Social
Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.4/Sub.2/1991/NGO/1
10 July 1991

Original: ENGLISH

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Sub-Commission on Prevention
of discrimination and
Protection of Minorities
Forty-third session
Item 17 of the provisional agenda

PROMOTION, PROTECTION AND RESTORATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AT NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS

Written statement submitted by the International Humanist and Ethical Union, a non-governmental organization on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following communication which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[1 June 1991]

1. It is clear that in seeking to promote, protect and restore human rights the problems encountered can be complex and many-sided. We know that they are aggravated by such factors as poverty, civil and inter-State conflicts, lack of education and various special causes of discrimination. But overall there exists too the variety of socio-economic, cultural, religious and political conditions and norms that prevail worldwide in some 170 sovereign States. With time, fresh knowledge and rapid technical change open up ever new vistas of right and responsibility that previously were quite unknown.

GE.91-12400/6685a

2. It is a fact that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and most related international instruments arose out of the Declaration of the Rights and Duties of the World Citizen first elaborated in London by the writer H.G. Wells between 1940 and 1942; and in diffusing his Declaration worldwide at that time, Wells was already conscious that the values that must underlie such a global code could not be assumed to be familiar common ground for all cultures.

3. Existing international norms of right and duty rest on a distinctive set of values and a specific conception of humanness; but the essence of that common underlying basis has never been openly defined or stated. For this reason the International Humanist and Ethical Union here suggests that the drafting and proclaiming of a Universal Declaration of Human Values could serve as a unifying statement that would help to explain, complement and reinforce the existing body of international human rights instruments. To illustrate and make clear the full nature of the proposal, a draft for such a Universal Declaration of Human Values will be found annexed to the present document.

Annex

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN VALUE

Preamble

Convinced that full realization of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights requires acceptance by all peoples of the world of those irreducible values on which rights and duties are founded;

Recalling that disregard of humane values has resulted in barbarous acts that have outraged the conscience of humanity;

Mindful that human beings develop ideals in common through the exercise of their rationality under conditions of social existence;

Conscious that an acceptance of basic shared values by peoples of all nations is a precondition for any global order founded on reason, truth, freedom and compassion;

Recognizing that the peoples of the United Nations, in the Charter and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, have affirmed their faith in the dignity and worth of the human person and have resolved to promote social and cultural progress in peace and harmony;

Further convinced that a common understanding and acceptance of basic human ideals must underlie the success of any such undertaking;

Now therefore the ...

Proclaims this Universal Declaration of Human Values as a common ideal and basis of attainment for all peoples and all nations, both in their personal and their collective relations.

Article 1. Awareness of values

Self-awareness, of the human person as a unique and responsible social being endowed with reason and conscience, is the ultimate source of all recognition of values.

Article 2. Reason

Reason, a hallmark of humanness, is an essential faculty in promoting the moral progress and well-being of humankind, enabling human beings to have a view of their own existence and a world view that together activate their thoughts, beliefs and actions. Pursuit of rational thinking is thus to be seen both as an intrinsic human attribute and a human value.

Article 3. Critical intelligence

It is in the essential nature of human beings to question, to examine and to seek to understand. In an effort to eliminate error it is vital to subject all beliefs to the scrutiny of reason and critical intelligence. An unexamined belief is not worth having.

Article 4. Truth

The aim of all rational thinking is the discovery of truth. Truth can only consist of conditional beliefs about reality that result from rational thinking and experience. Acceptance of an overarching quest for truth is thus to be seen as a supreme human value.

Article 5. Tolerance

To examine different interpretations of reality a reciprocity of tolerance is essential in the search for truth. Absence of such toleration must lead to denial of freedom and suppression of creativity.

Article 6. Creativity

All social advance is the outcome of human creativity. Rooted in the individuality of every human being, creativity can flourish only in an atmosphere conducive to freedom.

Article 7. Freedom

The uniqueness of every human person requires an acceptance of such freedom for each as is compatible with the maximizing of corresponding freedoms for all in every sphere of existence.

Article 8. Equality

Respect for the dignity of each unique personality requires that human beings shall be treated as equals in so far as concerns their birth, religion, colour or sex.

Article 9. Justice

A principle of justice as appropriately equal reciprocity, which connotes equal consideration for the well-being of every individual, must inform all social institutions and relations between individuals.

Article 10. Oneness of man and nature

Humans being a part of nature necessitates their living in harmony with nature. Concern for all life and for a maximum sustainable conserving of all natural and social environments is an essential part of all human activity.

Article 11. Universal cultural basis

Beyond the multiplicity of cultures it must be the aim of all human endeavour to evolve and maintain those common cultural elements that rest on reason, truth, equality of freedom, tolerance and compassion.